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**BEARS ARE  
DANGEROUS**

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*In 1961 at Norwegian Bay a man was attacked by a polar bear while lying on the ice in a sleeping bag. It was a warm and sunny day, and to sleep in the open was not an unusual practice. A bear approached and began to drag him around on the ice, perhaps mistaking him for a loafing seal. A companion awoke and shot the bear.*

## **Relevant Aspects of Polar Bear Natural History**

Polar bears are the largest land carnivore in the world (next in line come coastal grizzlies and Bengal tigers). They stand about 1.2 metres at the shoulder, and adult males weigh 400-500 kilograms. Their strength is awesome. Even a 60 kg cub is stronger than any human being.

Unlike other bears, polar bears are primarily carnivores. Their main food is ringed and bearded seals. Birds, vegetation, walrus and beluga whales are consumed to a lesser extent.

Polar bears are known to scavenge kills of other bears, and eat carrion and garbage. This is common in bears that are inexperienced hunters, as well as among bears in summer retreats where seals are inac-

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cessible. In the Arctic, almost any living creature that a polar bear encounters, including man, is potential prey.

Polar bears are curious and investigate any strange object they detect. They have a good sense of smell and hearing, and their vision is at least comparable to that of humans.

The polar bear does not consider man a serious threat to its welfare, and therefore may show no hesitation in investigating human activity.

Polar bears are highly mobile. Humans located in areas where bears are known to concentrate during specific periods can expect to encounter them.

Polar bears are distributed throughout the Canadian Arctic.

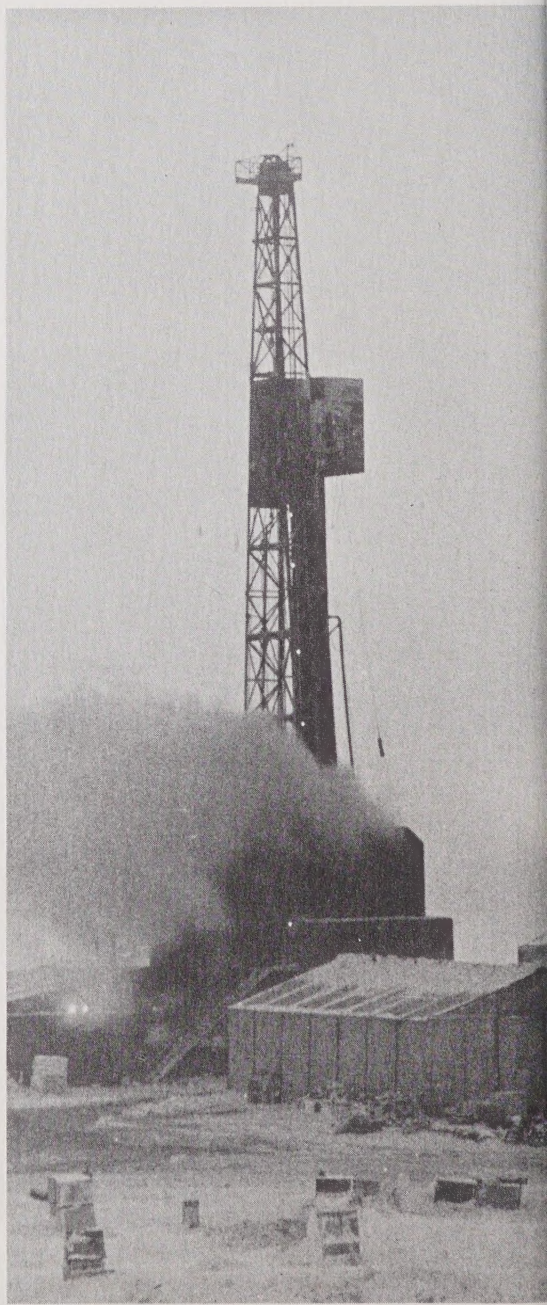
## Precautions

In the past, the solution to polar bear problems has been simply to kill the offending animal. Attitudes have changed and today the hoped-for solution is simply not to attract the animals to human activity.

Most problems with bears can be avoided by observing some simple precautions which, for the most part, are common sense. Bears will encounter you either by chance or because they are aware that you have food. You can reduce the possibility of encountering bears by chance by avoiding certain areas at certain times of the year. You can reduce the possibility of bear problems related to your activity by following some of the precautions suggested in this pamphlet. Remember however that bears are

unpredictable and that, even if you follow all of the suggestions, you can't be assured that you will not have polar bears in your camp or problems with them.

It is important to remember that, especially in the case of long-term or permanent camps, polar bears should be discouraged from visiting the campsite from the outset. Once a bear has become initiated to camp-robbing, it will be hard to break him of the habit.





*In 1966 a crew was engaged in setting up an aircraft navigational system off Prince Patrick Island. A man, on emerging alone from a camp Parcol, discovered a polar bear between himself and the Parcol. The man waited quietly for the bear to leave. When this did not happen, the man yelled, upon which the bear charged him. A second man came out and fired at the bear but failed to hit it. The bear then ran at him. A third man attempted to shoot the bear but was unable to get the safety off; he threw the rifle at the bear and ran into the Parcol. The first man who had been attacked finally retrieved the rifle and shot the bear.*

## Selection of Sites for Field Camps

Polar bears frequent certain kinds of habitat at certain times of the year. The possibility of problems with bears can be reduced if you avoid camping in these areas. Alternate locations or scheduling should be considered.

During the winter and spring, polar bears concentrate along floe edges and in active ice zones where seals can be easily caught. As the ice melts, some bears migrate to the permanent pack ice, while others go into deep bays that retain ice for a longer period. When the ice has completely melted in these deep bays, the bears then move onto land. These land areas, known as summer retreats, are usually located along coastlines, although polar bears have also been known to wander considerable distances inland. The bears then return to the wintering grounds when the ice forms again.

Generally, polar bears live on the sea ice or on land within a few kilometres of the coast. For precise information on key habitat areas, contact the Northwest Territories Wildlife Service in Yellowknife, or regional offices located in Cambridge Bay, Frobisher Bay, Inuvik, or Rankin Inlet.

If your work circumstances force







you to camp in polar bear habitat, here are some specific precautions you can take:

1. Avoid polar bear den sites (which are occupied from October through May). Although such sites are generally inconspicuous, they are often located on the leeward, south-facing slopes of coastal hills and valleys. Their presence is sometimes revealed by ventilation holes and, in early autumn or late spring, bear tracks may be found leading to or from the site. Unlike other hibernating animals, hibernating bears can awaken rapidly.

2. If you are staying on the ice, avoid camping near floe edges.

3. Camp as far as possible from the coastline in areas of known summer retreat.

4. If you are camping on the sea ice, look around for polar bear tracks. Avoid placing the camp area on a "bear highway". Bears hunt seals along pressure ridges, in the heavily pressured near-shore

ice along the floe edge, near polynyas (open water areas in the ice); and they travel across points of land.

5. If possible, select a high butte or bluff with a good view of surrounding terrain. Avoid areas of possible concealment of bears.

6. Summer camps on Arctic islands should not be set up on beaches since these areas tend to be used extensively by bears.

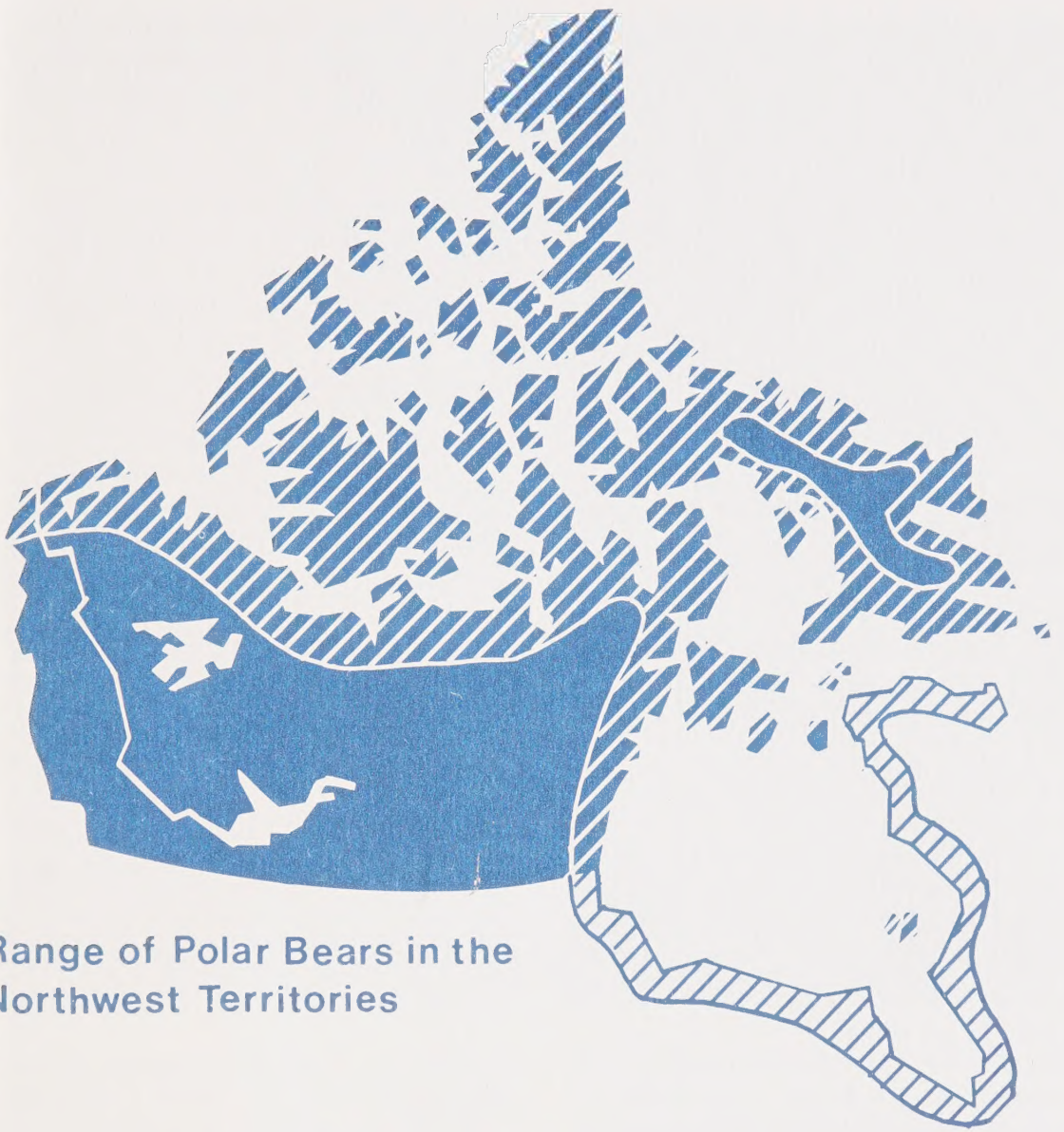
## **General Conduct and Camp Features**

Buildings should have windows near exits that permit a clear view of the outside. Doors should be well-lit. Look for bears before leaving a building.

Stay alert. Watch for signs of bear activity. If you think a bear is nearby, leave the area immediately.

If your camp is located in polar bear habitat, consider installing a warning system to protect sleeping





## Range of Polar Bears in the Northwest Territories

people. Contact the Wildlife Service in Yellowknife for suggestions.

Be especially cautious when moving outdoors at night during polar bear migration times. Children should not be allowed to play in shoreline rocks.

Never leave camp alone. Do not allow children to rush ahead. Maintain a good view of your surrounding terrain and avoid areas where a bear could be concealed. An early sighting will give you more time to respond.

Never approach a fresh kill — the bear may be nearby. If you investigate dead sea mammals, keep your head up. Stay alert.

Never approach a polar bear even if it is a cub which appears to be alone. Menstruating women should avoid travelling through polar bear habitat.

Do not carry articles which emit a strong artificial smell or a strong food odour.



*In 1973 a seismic operation took place in the vicinity of Kendall Island in the Beaufort Sea. A cat operator had just finished lunch and was leaving the cookshack. As he was walking down the steps, preceded by the cook, a polar bear hiding underneath the structure killed him with a single blow to the back of the head. The bear was not seen by either man, and attacked without warning or provocation.*

## **Cooking, Food Storage, and Garbage Disposal**

Improper treatment of garbage and storage of food are probably the most common causes of problems with bears.

Incinerate and bury all garbage. Take special care to burn meat and fish scraps as well as sanitary napkins. Sewage and garbage must be completely burned to ash or otherwise eliminated at least daily. Sewage odours may be eliminated with lye or lime.

Locate your latrine and garbage disposal pit where they can be seen from the main buildings or tents. The area should be well-lit. Dogs should not be allowed into the area. Garbage should be moved to the dump before dark where possible.

Keep camps clean - do not give bears a reason for a visit. Clean kitchen utensils after every meal. Keep barbecues and tables free of grease. Pay attention to dishwater disposal.

Wear a hat or kerchief when cooking to reduce the smell of grease which may accumulate in your hair. Avoid storing the clothes you cook in beside your sleeping area. Avoid

cooking foods that give off a strong odour, such as canned fish. (Freeze-dried foods are relatively odourless.)

Keep your sleeping area separate from your food storage and cooking area. Store food in bear-proof buildings or sealed metal drums.

## **Hunters and Fishermen**

Never leave camp alone.

Do not sleep in or with clothes soiled or bloodied while hunting or fishing.

Clean fish away from the campsite. Dispose of entrails immediately after cleaning, and uneaten fish immediately after meals.

Store your tackle, knives, nets, etc., away from living facilities.

Establish meat caches where they are visible and well-removed from the camp.

If hunting marine mammals, avoid bringing carcasses into the camp area. Set up your processing area away from the camp and leave there anything that has come into contact with marine mammal remains. Don't make more than one trail into camp and approach from the front of the tent. Remember - marine mammals are the polar bear's main source of food.

Use common sense.

## **Polar Bear Monitors**

One method used by petroleum companies to detect and deter polar bears is to use patrols by experienced native hunters on snow machines. These patrols are con-





ducted around the camp at intervals of 2-4 hours. Bears are either chased away or, where absolutely necessary, shot. The use of such patrols is often good for camp morale, but employees must not rely exclusively on such patrols, or abandon common sense precautions.

## Dogs

Dogs in camps can be an effective means of preventing polar bear incidents. But not all bears are afraid of dogs, and some dogs may be useless. This means that special care must be taken in choosing dogs, as well as in their handling.

Northern dogs trained to bark at the approach of bears, and to fight

them, are available in Yellowknife. Dogs unused to these situations may be a liability, either by failing to warn of the approach of bears, or by leading bears into a camp.

Dogs kept in a camp should not be treated as pets, and should be fed only once a day. Employees providing hand-outs to dogs throughout the day will only impair their effectiveness.





*In 1975, on an artificial island in the Beaufort Sea, a construction worker was killed by a polar bear while working alone on the deck of a barge. When he failed to show up, others searched for him. They found his remains some distance away from the barge.*

## Encounters!

There are no hard and fast rules about what to do if you meet a polar bear. The reaction of a polar bear to you will never be entirely predictable.

Make an effort to stay calm and assess the situation. Don't panic. Never run unless you have a head-start and only a short distance to safety. Try to leave an avenue of escape open to the bear.

Think about your surroundings before you act.

You might be able to scare a bear away by:

- a) firing warning shots. Do not, however, fire towards it, as a ricocheting bullet could injure the animal and add to your problems.
- b) using a scaring device such as a Thunderflash or a shell cracker (which is fired from a shotgun). The Wildlife Service can provide details on how these devices may be obtained.
- c) shouting, banging pots together, or emitting a loud low-pitched grunt or growl.
- d) starting the engine of a snowmobile. If the bear is chased for several kilometres, it may be sufficiently frightened to prevent its return. **Always carry a firearm\*** and do not shut off the motor.



Helicopters that land on the sea ice and shut down their engines should be equipped with a **loaded firearm\*** to protect the aircraft and occupants from bear attacks. Land in an open area away from pressure ice and large ridges.

If you are hiking through pressured sea ice, always be on the alert for bears. **Carry a firearm.\*** You are potential prey in this habitat.

Bears may indicate annoyance by making a huffing sound or chomping their teeth together, lowering their head while facing you, rushing a few paces in your direction and then stopping. At or before any of these signs there may be time to back out of the situation, provided the bear is more than 50 metres away.

### **If You Must Kill...**

You should be armed with a high-powered rifle of sufficient calibre (such as a .308, 30-06, or 7 mm magnum) or a 12 gauge shotgun with SSG loads or slugs.

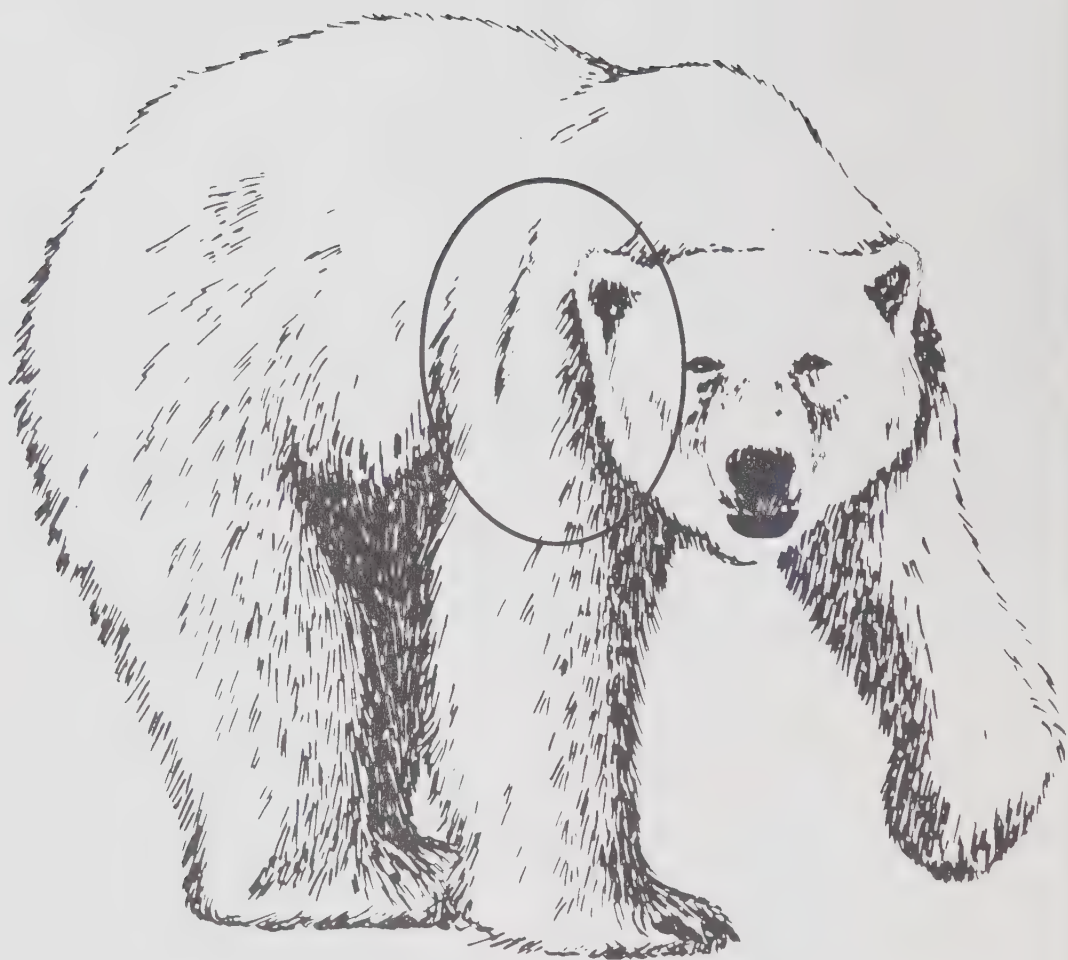
Purchase weapons from a reliable manufacturer. For your own protection buy the best weapon you can afford. Shooting a polar bear which is threatening you will take nerve and skill.

Be familiar with the operation of your gun. **Practice with it.\*** Know how to operate the safety. Keep your gun clean and guard against condensation which may cause rust, freeze the mechanism, or form an ice plug in the barrel.

**\*Note Well:** Unless you have a valid N.W.T. hunting licence, you are prohibited from having an **unsealed** firearm in a camp outside a settlement or municipality which is used for construction, exploration, scientific research, mining, or surveying. Contact the nearest Wildlife Officer for specific details, and to have your firearm sealed.

Since practising with a sealed firearm is impossible without breaking the seal, you must ensure familiarity with your weapon before arriving in camp.





## Give the Bear a Chance

Try to scare the polar bear away first. Bears are inquisitive animals - an approaching bear may only be trying to identify you. But don't attempt to scare a bear by approaching any closer than 50 metres, and **always carry a firearm just in case.\***





In cold weather many experienced hunters prefer to store their firearms outside the entrance to their tent or cabin. This guards against condensation caused by bringing a firearm from the cold into a heated area. This condensation can then freeze on returning outside and may cause a malfunction. If you choose to keep a firearm inside when the weather is cold, you must ensure by careful cleaning that condensation has not formed before returning outside.

Whatever your practice, ensure that the location of your firearm is known and within easy reach of all. The magazine should be loaded at all times. **Do not however put a shell into the chamber unless danger is imminent.**

If killing is unavoidable, shoot for the front shoulder region. This will stop the bear from coming closer or from running wounded through the camp. It will give the time you need for a killing shot if it is neces-

sary. Keep firing aimed shots until the bear is dead.

### **Alone, Unarmed and Threatened**

If possible, seek shelter in a building or vehicle.

If there is no shelter nearby, stand your ground. Don't run. Continually face the animal and growl or roar in a loud, low-pitched voice. Drop your pack or any article of clothing and back away. This may distract the bear. Drop any food you may be carrying.

If contact appears unavoidable, you must make every attempt to protect your vital organs. Drop to the ground, knees drawn up to the chest and hands clasped tightly over your neck. Keeping still is of utmost importance. If a bear does try to maul you, serious injury may be reduced or prevented by keeping still. Most people survive bear maulings.





## **The Law**

You are within the law to shoot a polar bear **only** when life or property is threatened. The incident must be reported to the nearest Wildlife Officer immediately.

It is an offence to allow the hide of a bear to spoil. The hide becomes the property of the Government. It, and the skull (or lower jaw) must be turned in to a Wildlife Officer.

The bear should be skinned immediately. The hide should be properly cleaned, stretched and dried - or liberally salted - or frozen - to prevent spoilage.

Dispose of the carcass as best you can. Failure to do so may invite more visits by other bears.

**Don't let your carelessness cause the unnecessary death of a polar bear - or another human being.**







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